

**Contents: below is a list of the genres the student has included in her project.**

Poem  
Email  
Opinion essay  
Magazine article  
Photo caption essay

What fun is life if you suck at everything you do? I don't think it would be fun at all. Playing games, knowing that you'll end up losing must not be a very edifying practice. Hence certain people have certain talents. I'm sure it's written down in our genetic code. "Timmy is good at *this* so he doesn't feel so bad about himself." Everyone has some specific, certain talent or field that he/she/it excels at. That's what this agglomeration of writing is about. It's about my talent, my most redeeming features. The talent I could sell on the black market, if that were possible. I am an expert about computers and their maintenance, and I would like to share that with you today. And even though our talents make us unique, I hope that you learn something about my talent today.

*Way too many operating systems,  
Windows 3.1, and Win 95.  
Windows ME had illogical listdoms,  
Mac OS X is just a bunch of jive*

*There's Linux for the pretentious Geek-face,  
And UNIX for servers, always online.  
Most have IPs that some people can trace.  
Some IPs might sue and stick you a fine.*

*There's one OS that beats all of the rest  
A lovely blue omen, gleaming at night  
It barely crashes, it can pass all tests  
Running everything at the speed of light.*

*Don't get on its bad side, you cannot fight  
The windows XP's incredible might.*

To: Tom and Mary O'Rourke

Subject: SOMETHING HORRIBLE HAPPENED, OHNOES!!1

Hi Mom and Dad,

I had a problem recently with a computer component of mine. I'm obviously typing this from the computer lab, because my computer is currently out of commission. The power supply that came with my computer case decided it would be fun to let a power surge destroy its inner guts, and also to take the AGP

port of my motherboard with it. I can't see any video on my monitor, because it's fried and dead. This leads to a horrible consequence of me having to buy a new motherboard. I know it seems kinda odd, I mean honestly, how often does a power supply fry itself and a motherboard? Anyway, as you know, I don't have a job. So this is basically a plea for help in the form of money. If I don't have a computer, my grades will surely plummet. I mean, I have a programming class, how will I program? There's really no place on campus for me to go and do my programming, so I need it soon, before I fail my class. My teacher doesn't accept late work - at all. So if you could deposit around \$120.00 in my bank account so I could afford to purchase a new motherboard, that would be great. I grabbed my old power supply from Doombox mk.I when I was home last.

Waiting in anticipation,  
Your lovely son,  
Brendon

*Let me first off state that I am by no means conceivably worthy of doing the deed I am about to attempt. There's no possible way that a modest college student such as myself has the physical or mental devices required to possibly write such an essay as is needed in order to convey the importance and grace that shrouds the little piezo transducer in my computer. Not to say that I possess ownership of this beautiful little component, for it is impossible for any one human to possess anything such as gorgeous as this little transducer. Sometimes called a PC Speaker, it contains what is needed to make the sounds of utmost importance: the beep when a computer is turned on.*

*Have you ever turned on a computer and not heard the familiar beep of the piezo transducer? That's a very sad time indeed. I mean, what kind of fool can live without that beep? Perhaps the beep is menial and you don't understand it, but I do. The beep is one of the most important parts of the startup of a computer. I mean, do you know what*

*that beep means? It means that the computer has passed the POST test and that everything is running smoothly. What if the beep doesn't happen? That could mean that something horribly wrong has happened, and that the computer is about to explode! Not really, but the piezo transducer lives a life of trickery and danger. Once, the piezo transducer fought a horde of ninjas! This was at the same time as when he fought all those pirates off of his yacht. The pirates and the ninjas were both put to shame by the piezo transducer. The piezo transducer though, being not afraid to make new friends, took the ninjas and pirates out for a picnic after they fought. Now he's friends with both ninjas and pirates alike.*

*Did you know that the piezo transducer is a war hero? Used in sonar in the First World War, it saved the lives of our American submariners. And... the piezo transducer is just so wonderful, and... I just think I'm gonna cry a little... PIEZO TRANSDUCER I LOVE YOU!*

# **MAXTOR DRIVES HAVE RELIABILITY, COOLING ISSUES**

Bad news for hard disk manufacturer Maxtor: Their drives have issues with cooling properly and reliability. Myself, being the technology editor of this paper, can attest to the failures of Maxtor drives, having had a Maxtor failure myself. There's a great mystery behind this phenomenon – Maxtor drives are exactly the same as all other drives, at first glance. I'm not certain what makes Maxtor's drives any different than Seagate or Western Digital drives. Apparently there's something thrown in the works that just doesn't... work. "I now have two failures for two drives," says one customer of Maxtor's DiamondMax hard disk series. Maxtor, started in 1982, makes hard drives for personal, home, and server use. What's a hard drive, and what's it mean to me, you may be asking. Hard disk drives are the physical component

of a computer where data is stored.

This, of course, means that no hard

drive equals no saved documents, no mp3s, no games, and no operating system. Your computer can't run without a hard disk drive. It's like having a bike without wheels. There even is a wheel in a hard drive; it's called a platter. It's a magnetic disc that spins at a high RPM and is read by a separate component called a "head."



An offending Maxtor hard drive  
It's almost like a magnetically-based record player, where the platter is a record and the head is the needle. Data is stored magnetically, and does not

need power supplied to the drive to keep the data intact, unlike RAM and other types of computer memory.

Bottom line – Don't buy a Maxtor hard drive.



This thing is my computer. This sprawling mass of cables and metal, plastic and lights, is my computer. It's named Uberdoombox, since it clearly contains doom. I mean look at it, there's a blue light and everything. This picture reminds me of the process of building it. It's an ongoing process, really. There's always new stuff to add to it, but I'm going to detail the process of building a computer.

First of all, you have to make sure that when building a computer, all your parts will work together. I'm not sure if that sounds easy or not, but ensuring system compatibility is the toughest part of building your own computer. After you've made sure that all your parts will fit into each other where they're supposed to, you can begin putting the pieces together. The first step involved in physically building the computer is to prepare the case. The case has holes in the back sheet of steel for little brass screws used to keep the motherboard from directly contacting the case. These are called motherboard standoffs. If you look at your motherboard, you can determine where the holes for the screws to keep it

in place are. These line up with the holes in the case, and indicate where motherboard standoffs should be installed. There are several different types of motherboards, and they all vary in size. Once the standoffs are installed, the motherboard can be lowered down into the case and screwed in to the motherboard standoffs.

After the motherboard, the traditional next step is to install the processor. The processor acts as the brain of the computer. It's what controls everything. Processors these days are very small – about the size of two postage stamps next to each other – and are also very easy to install. If building a Pentium 4 system (which mine is) there will be a small gold triangle located on the corner of the processor die. This is to be lined up with the corner of the CPU socket. There's a lever on the side of the CPU socket, and it's called a ZIF lever. ZIF stands for "Zero Insertion Force." When the lever is lifted, place the CPU into the socket, making sure the gold arrow is pointing at the corner of the ZIF lever. The CPU will drop its pins into place effortlessly. Push down on the processor gently as you lower the ZIF lever, ensuring that the processor is in snugly. Once that's done, the cooling solution can be installed. Usually, a heat sink and fan combination comes with a factory packaged processor. This simply snaps on over the processor.

After the processor, the next most important piece is the computer memory. Depending on what type and amount of memory you purchased for your computer, installation varies. The most popular type of computer memory today is called DDR memory, and it comes in a package type called "DIMM," or



Dual Inline Memory Module. These are very easy to install, as they're inserted into the appropriate slot and secured into place with some firm pressure. Clips snap up around the memory so you know it's in place. There are many different speeds of RAM, and the speed of the RAM is directly related to how fast your computer is. If you have a very fast processor but some very slow RAM, your computer is going to run pretty slowly. Memory is just as, if not more important, as the processor.

After the motherboard, CPU, and RAM are installed, the next things to install are the expansion cards. Expansion cards are everything else that the processor and RAM aren't. You need a video card, so you can actually see what's going on, and a sound card is usually installed for a more aural experience. A network card can be installed so you can connect to a network, or for those kids stuck at home, a modem for dial-up internet access can be used. What expansion cards you need is dependant on what you're going to use your computer for.

Every computer needs a hard drive. The hard drive is screwed into place in the case, where there's a designated area for it. My computer can hold up to six drives, for example, even though I only have three. The hard drive is usually an IDE device, which means that it's connected to the motherboard so it can communicate to the processor and RAM, and it's connected with a 40-pin, 80-wire cable called an IDE cable. If you've ever seen a gray floppy ribbon in a computer, that's an IDE cable. Being a cooling freak and wanting to get a better airflow through my case, I bought two smaller, round silver cables that work the same as the gray floppy ribbons. CD-Rom drives are IDE devices too, and every

computer needs a CD-Rom drive. Those are installed in the front of the case, in 5.25in slots designed for accommodating those. After the hard drives and CD-Rom drives are installed, the power supply can be installed and then the process of wiring up the system can occur.

The power supply is installed near the back of the computer, and is held in place with four screws. Then, the wires are plugged into their respective devices. The motherboard power connector, called a “P1,” is a block of 20 cables that plugs into a special location on the motherboard. A second power connector, a 4-pin block, is inserted into the motherboard as well. This supplies a constant 12v to the motherboard, and enables the power to be controlled by the operating system, which is a system called “soft power.” The device connectors are called “Molex” connectors, and they plug into the hard drive and CD-Rom drive.

After the power connections are in place, the motherboard needs to be wired up to the case’s power and restart button. This is the hardest part of putting a computer together. There’s a block of tiny bare pins on the motherboard, and the case comes with a set of wires leading from the power button, the reset button, and the power and hard drive activity lights. All of these are individual tiny wires that need to go around the pins on the motherboard. It’s a very annoying process, especially when the case manufacturers don’t label which wire is which polarity.

Case wires, after being plugged into the proper places, are the last step in building our computer. After this, the computer can be plugged into the wall and all the peripherals (monitor, keyboard, mouse, speakers) can be plugged into it. The only thing left is installing the operating system, but I’m not going to share

how to do that. I'll you figure that one out on your own. I mean, it's not as hard as plugging in those friggin' case wires.

There. Computers, hardware, mishaps, adventure, excitement, and a teeny little thing that goes “beep.” That’s my talent. These are the things I spend my time with. If you’re reading this now, that means you read it all. You’ve read everything I wrote about my talent. You read and hopefully absorbed things about my field of expertise, and I just wish to thank you for taking the time to read and possibly learn about my favorite extracurricular activity. Because, well, I am human after all, and when I die, I’m sure you’ll be their next call when Windows causes a catastrophic system meltdown. Good job, computer cadet!